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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI FONMIN URGES REVISED AMISOM MANDATE

REF: 09 DJIBOUTI 555; 09 DJIBOUTI 563  
20 JUNE 2009 SWAN-PATTERSON TELCONS

CLASSIFIED BY: James Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1.(C) Summary: Worried that Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) risks being "overwhelmed," Djibouti's Foreign Minister proposes modifying the AMISOM mandate to permit countries bordering Somalia to contribute forces. While the move would be intended primarily to encourage deployment of Kenyan troops, the FonMin said that Djibouti is also willing to send a contingent to Somalia to help shore up the TFG. The FonMin said these issues would be discussed further during the African Union summit in Sirte. End summary.

12. (C) Foreign Minister Mahmoud Yousseuf called Ambassador evening June 19 to express concern over the "very serious" reverses faced by the TFG in the previous two days. Both the TFG and AMISOM are at risk of being "overwhelmed." Al-Shabaab's gains in the strategic Karan neighborhood of Mogadishu put the extremists in a position to close the airport and port. TFG President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed continues to call Djiboutian President Ismael Omar Guelleh almost daily to request support. Sharif sees an urgent need to strengthen and expand AMISOM. Guelleh supports this view. If the TFG forces are going to defeat their opponents, they need improved mobility and better command and control. Additional AMISOM forces could help address this "weakness of command."

13. (C) In a follow-up call mid-day June 20, Yousseuf said he had spoken with Kenyan Foreign Minister Moses Wetangula regarding what Yousseuf described as a tentative Kenyan offer to contribute troops to AMISOM. Increasingly concerned over developments in Somalia, the Kenyans have already deployed additional military on their side of the border with Somalia, Yousseuf reported. The potential Kenyan contribution would be in addition to a Burundian offer to deploy an additional battalion to AMISOM. According to Yousseuf, Wetangula told him that Kenyan President Kibaki would meet with his defense council within the next two days to decide on military options regarding Somalia.

14. (C) A Kenyan contribution would require modifying the existing AMISOM mandate to permit deployment of troops from countries bordering Somalia. Yousseuf said that President Guelleh favored such a change in mandate. Djibouti would also contribute forces for Somalia, despite Djibouti's small army, meager resources, and defensive commitments on the border with Eritrea. Stabilizing Somalia is such an urgent priority that Djibouti would offer its own troops in order to encourage other, larger countries also to deploy with AMISOM. Yousseuf said Djibouti would make two companies available for this mission.

¶5. (C) Youssouf said he expected discussion at the African Union Summit on ways to accelerate troop contributions to AMISOM and to modify the existing mandate to permit neighbors to deploy. He and other Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Foreign Ministers planned to contact African Union Chairman Jean Ping prior to the summit to lay the groundwork for modifying the AMISOM mandate.

¶6. (C) Comment: The GODJ remains intensely focused on ways to bolster the TFG at this critical moment. The GODJ has supplied weapons to the TFG and offered to train TFG units in Djibouti (Ref A). The GODJ has previously urged modification of the AMISOM mandate to permit AMISOM forces to provide direct support to TFG military operations, including offensives against al-Shabaab and other opponents (Ref B). We defer to Embassy Nairobi and the Somalia Unit as to how serious the Kenyans may be about a possible deployment under AMISOM (Ref C). Of course, any modification of AMISOM's mandate to permit neighbors to deploy would have to include reassurance that this is not merely cover for the return of Ethiopian forces to Somalia. GODJ willingness to contribute its own troops to AMISOM demonstrates both GODJ fear for the survival of the TFG and commitment to do the maximum to save it.  
SWAN